

Speaker May Deviate from Prepared Remarks

**Remarks Prepared for Delivery by James B. Comey
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Thank you, Yost, and good morning, everyone. It's great to be here.

When I met with you in Philadelphia a year ago, I was still very much in the "drinking from a fire hose" phase of this job, having been FBI Director for just over a month. Since then, I've traveled all over the U.S. and abroad to visit my troops — so far, I've visited 51 of our 56 field offices, and 13 of our 64 Legats overseas.

What I've seen on my travels has confirmed what I have long believed — that the FBI is filled with amazing people, doing an amazing array of things around the world, and doing them well. I wake up every day excited to be part of the FBI, and part of our broader law enforcement family.

On these trips, I've also met with state, local, and international law enforcement leaders, because I need to hear your ideas on what the FBI can do to make our good partnerships even better. As I mentioned last year, I come from a law enforcement family, and I've worked with law enforcement throughout my career. But this job has given me a new and unique vantage point to see all the good work your departments do, and all the challenges you face as law enforcement leaders. As long as I'm the FBI Director, I will listen to your concerns, and I will remain a strong advocate for your interests in Washington — and wherever else people will put up with me.

Today, I want to spend a few minutes talking with you about some of the FBI's current priorities, and then I'd like to discuss some of the major issues we're facing together as a law enforcement family.

Terrorism

During my travels, I've asked my own people and our partners lots of questions about what the FBI needs to focus on.

I've taken a good, hard look at our investigative priorities, and I think they still hold water. Unfortunately, the evolving threat of terrorism remains at the top of the list, and last week's attacks in Montreal and Ottawa served as a stark reminder of why that is so.

To our Canadian colleagues here today, let me express our deepest sympathies for the loss of your fellow citizens, and our resolve to stand with you as we continue to fight this common threat to our people and our freedoms.

Having been out of government for almost a decade before I came to the FBI, I've discovered the terrorist threat has changed in two ways that strike me.

First, while we've shrunk the core Al Qaeda tumor in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region significantly, we're now seeing that cancer metastasize into the progeny of Al Qaeda. These offshoots are thriving in the poorly governed and ungoverned spaces in the Middle East and Africa, and I wake up every day thinking about them.

What's happening now Syria and Iraq with ISIL is a prime example of this metastasis. Groups like ISIL and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula are offering people all over the world, including here in the United States, safe havens to acquire terrorism training and experience.

And while I'm concerned about the going over, I'm even more concerned about the coming back.

I fear there will eventually be a terrorist diaspora out of Syria, just as there was out of the Afghanistan war with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. You can draw a line between that terrorist diaspora and 9/11. The outflow from Syria and elsewhere will be much larger and harder to track — and we cannot allow it to follow a similar line to a future tragedy.

The second way the terrorism threat has changed is the influence of the Internet and the rise of homegrown violent extremists.

Aspiring terrorists no longer need to travel and meet someone in Al Qaeda; now they can get all the inspirational poison they need for their minds, and the training they need to conduct attacks, while sitting in their pajamas in their basement. And it's very hard for us to spot this before they emerge and try to kill innocent people.

Again, the attacks in Canada last week are a prime example of this. In this time of heightened threats, we must remain vigilant and work together as closely as possible if we are to succeed in finding and stopping these homegrown extremists before they can act.

Many people think of terrorism as an issue only for the Feds, but all of you know better — because you play an irreplaceable role in our counterterrorism efforts. Your departments contribute hugely to the work of our JTFs and fusion centers, and your officers are often the first to notice something unusual happening in your communities. The evolving terrorist threat will present a great challenge over the next decade — and we will continue to count on your help to stay ahead of this threat.

Intelligence

One of the ways we stay ahead of threats like terrorism is, of course, intelligence. And based on what I've heard during this past year, I've decided that intelligence is one of a few key areas I want to focus on at the FBI in the near term — in particular, how we share the intelligence we all need to do our jobs well.

If we are to be truly great at intelligence, we must get better at collecting, analyzing, and sharing intelligence in everything we do. We must be able to identify what we know, what we need to know, and — most relevant to all of you — who else needs to know, among both our federal, state, and local partners, and the private sector.

The FBI has come a long way in its intelligence transformation over the past decade, but there is still room to improve and grow.

That's why I decided recently to re-institute the FBI's Intelligence Branch — which elevates and expands our intelligence program and gives our EAD for Intelligence, Eric Velez-Villar, a seat at the table with senior FBI executives. I'm confident this will result in better integration of our intelligence and operations — and that will ultimately make the exchange of intelligence with our partners, including all of you, more effective and efficient.

I've been pleased to see the progress we've made on this front in recent years, particularly in our working relationships within the JTTFs and fusion centers. Communication among partners is more frequent, more fluid, and more thorough — both at the senior level, such as in the JTTF Executive Boards, and in the field at squad level.

Many of the FBI's field offices are also now sharing the results of our Threat Review and Prioritization process with their local partners, so you can see how we are identifying priority threats in those areas of responsibility, and how your departments fit into that picture. More field offices will be doing this as we move forward.

You've probably also noticed here in Orlando that we've returned the FBI's SAC conference to the site of your conference, and we've invited IACP committee chairs into our discussions. I hope this has been a good chance for you to keep building those relationships, and that you will continue to have honest discussions with your local SACs. I need to know, and they need to know, where you think we should be doing more to help you, so we can work better together.

The strength of our partnerships is essential, because today we're confronting some tough challenges together as a law enforcement family — and that's what I'd like to talk about next.

Going Dark

A major challenge we face today in law enforcement is what's known as "Going Dark."

As you know, a combination of outdated laws and rapid technology change is making it increasingly hard for us to access the evidence we need to prosecute crime and prevent terrorism, even with lawful authority. The Going Dark problem has accelerated in recent years, and the emergence of default encryption settings promises to make the challenge to law enforcement markedly worse.

Many of you, like me, were taken aback when the good people at Apple and Google announced recently that their new smartphone operating systems will encrypt data on those devices by default. This means the companies themselves won't be able to unlock phones, laptops, and tablets to reveal photos, documents, e-mail, and recordings stored within, even pursuant to a court order.

The more we as a society rely on these devices, the more important they are to those of us in law enforcement. You have all seen case after case — from homicides and car crashes to drug trafficking, domestic abuse, and child exploitation — where critical evidence came from smartphones, hard drives, and online communication.

But today, we're seeing more and more cases where we believe significant evidence resides on a phone or a laptop, but we can't crack the password.

The Going Dark challenge increases the risk that we in law enforcement will miss out on predators who exploit the most vulnerable among us ... miss out on violent criminals who target our communities ... or miss out on a terrorist cell using social media to recruit, plan, and execute an attack.

I'm deeply concerned about this, both as a law enforcement officer and a citizen. I'm a huge believer in the rule of law. But I also believe that no one in this country should be above or beyond the law. There should be no law-free zone in this country.

I like and believe very much that we need to follow the letter of the law to examine the contents of someone's closet or someone's smartphone. But the notion that the marketplace could create something that would prevent that closet from ever being opened, even with a properly obtained court order, makes no sense to me, and probably not to you, either.

I've been talking a lot about this issue recently, as you might have noticed. My concern is that in a post-Snowden world, the pendulum has swung too far in a direction of fear and mistrust, based on a failure to understand why we in law enforcement do what we do, and how we do it. So I'm trying to start a national conversation about this. I hope you'll help me continue this conversation in your own communities, with the private sector, and with our elected leaders.

We need them to know how Going Dark threatens our ability to protect the citizens we are sworn to serve. There will come a day — and it comes every day in our business — where it will matter a great deal to innocent people that we in law enforcement can't access certain types of data or information, even with legal authorization.

I want to ensure that when our nation discusses limiting the court-authorized tools we use to investigate suspected criminals, that we all clearly understand what society gains — and what we all stand to lose.

Threats to Law Enforcement

I know another of your chief concerns is making sure your officers get home safe every night — and it's a concern I share.

Recently we've seen a disturbing increase in shootings and ambush-style attacks against law enforcement officers. According to FBI statistics, as of September 30th of this year, 38 of our nation's law enforcement officers have been feloniously killed — that's 16 more than during the same time period last year — and six of these officers were killed in ambushes.

One such ambush took place late one night last month in Pennsylvania, outside a state police barracks. An assailant using a high-powered rifle killed state trooper Bryon Dickson and wounded another trooper.

Attacks like this on law enforcement personnel aren't a matter of abstract statistics for me, or anyone else in the FBI. One of the toughest yet most important things I do as FBI Director is to call the family whenever an officer is killed in the line of duty in this country. I call to let them know that we share their sorrow, and that they will always have the love and support of the FBI, and the entire law enforcement family.

The FBI and the Justice Department take attacks on law enforcement officers very seriously — and we're doing all we can to provide the tools and training to help officers survive them. For example, four years ago the Department of Justice launched the VALOR initiative to help officers survive violent assaults. So far, more than 15,000 law enforcement officers have taken VALOR training, at no cost to their departments.

We're also doing all we can to bring to justice those who carry out these attacks. Just days after the shooting of the two Pennsylvania state troopers last month, the FBI added the man allegedly responsible, Eric Matthew Frein, to our Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List — and the men and women of the FBI will not rest until he is found.

"Militarization of Police" Debate

While our officers and agents face an increasingly dangerous environment, we're also seeing a growing debate about the so-called "militarization" of police forces, and the rise of what critics call "warrior cops."

I know this debate has discouraged many of you, knowing the dangers your officers face every time they put on the uniform — and especially when you see brothers and sisters in law enforcement being gunned down in cold blood. But I also understand where good people are coming from with these concerns, and I'm glad we live in a country where we can discuss those concerns openly. So let me offer a few thoughts on this.

First, it's important to remind our fellow citizens that we in law enforcement often confront very bad people who will use any means necessary to do awful things. That includes assailants who use high-powered weapons to kill both innocent victims and

anyone wearing a badge who tries to stop them — good men like Corporal Dickson in Pennsylvania. That is the reality law enforcement faces today.

Second: Because of that reality, we need a range of weapons and equipment to respond effectively to a variety of encounters. Those encounters will involve everyone from jaywalkers to mass-killers using assault weapons and body armor. Our equipment is never meant for offense; it is meant to give our officers the best possible chance to survive violent encounters with bad people and bring them to justice, while protecting the innocent from harm.

The real issue here is not the necessity of such equipment, but rather the context in which it is used — when and how advanced equipment and weapons are deployed; and how our officers are trained to use them.

This context is especially important in the age of social media, in which images and perceptions dominate public discourse, for better or worse. That requires us to be aware of how our use of advanced weapons and equipment will be perceived and portrayed.

As Director of the FBI, I want to ensure my Special Agents are trained to use properly all the equipment at their disposal, and to deploy it in the right times and places. I want them to have all the equipment they need to get the job done — but not to use it in a way that unnecessarily threatens or antagonizes innocent people. And I will hold my Agents accountable for that. I know that all of you share that same commitment to your officers, and to your communities.

Striking this balance is often difficult, and sometimes it can feel like we in law enforcement face a “no-win” situation. Take the Going Dark problem. Many citizens instinctively recoil at the idea of investigators having even lawful access to emails, texts, and phone calls to catch criminals and terrorists. Yet many of the same citizens demand we do everything possible to “connect the dots” and break up terrorist cells before they can act, or catch child predators before more children become victims.

Likewise, some of our fellow citizens are uneasy about their city’s police department having armored vehicles or a SWAT team, for example. Yet they also expect our first responders, our police, to be ready to act decisively when the next mass-shooting like Virginia Tech or Aurora takes place, or if a Mumbai-style terrorist attack ever happens here.

In both cases, we need to have an open conversation with the citizens we serve, so that we can understand their perspectives — and so they can better understand what we do, and how and why we do it. What we learn from these conversations can help us in law enforcement to strike the balance we need, and maintain the trust and confidence of our fellow citizens.

Conclusion

As law enforcement leaders, you and I have a lot on our plates. We have hard

jobs — there's no denying that. But I can't imagine a group of people I would rather do hard things with than the people in this room today, and all the good people in your departments and agencies back home. I'm grateful — and the entire FBI is grateful — for the work you and your officers do. And I look forward to continuing to serve the American people alongside you in the years to come.

Thank you.

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